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Digest

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- **Mitsubishi Heavy Industries unveil Taigei submarine**

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) unveiled a 3,000-tonne new class of diesel-electric submarine in Kobe, called Taigei, fitted with lithium-ion batteries. The submarine reportedly built at an estimated cost of US\$758.7 million, is likely to enter service in March 2022. Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force has confirmed that Taigei boasts a length of 84 m, a beam of 9.1 m, and a draught of 10.4 m. Taigei is powered by a diesel-electric engine generating 6,000 horsepower, and uses lithium-ion batteries rather than lead-acid batteries, as in the case of the last two of 12 Soryu-class submarines. Taigei submarine is expected to be quieter, and reportedly brings Tokyo's submarine fleet to 22, as outlined in the National Defense Program Guideline in 2010. Japan runs 9 Oyashio-class submarines and 11 Soryu-class submarines. The 12th Soryu is being built. A total of 7 Taigeis are planned as aging Oyashio submarines are nearing retirement. Japan's Soryu class submarines came 11 years after the Oyashio class, and the Taigei has come a decade after the Soryu class.

- **Japan-Vietnam Strengthens Defence Cooperation**

Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide in his maiden overseas trip after assuming office on September 16 visited Vietnam and Indonesia from October 18-21. Both countries are important pillars of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. He underscored Japan's support for ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), articulated in 2019, and emphasised the need to advance common principles of rule of law, openness, freedom, transparency and inclusiveness. In Vietnam, which happens to be the current ASEAN Chair, Prime Minister Suga stressed that Tokyo is strongly opposed to any actions that escalate tensions in the South China Sea. Japan has largely pursued defence cooperation in the region through its Vientiane Vision focussing on strengthening rule of law, maritime security, and capacity building. In this regard, Japan has reached substantial agreement with Vietnam in order to advance technological cooperation and transfer of defence equipment to Vietnam. The proposed agreement, reportedly called as the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, will be an enabler when it comes to exporting equipment including surface combatants such as offshore patrol vessels, maritime patrol aircraft, radar and surveillance equipment, and communications and information systems. Earlier in July, Japan extended US\$349 million loan to Hanoi to support procurement of six patrol vessels for coast guards.

- **Japan and Australia Begin Coordination on Military Asset Protection**

On October 19, Japan-Australia Defence Ministers Meeting was held in Tokyo. There was a decision to begin coordination in order to create a framework to protect Australian Defence Force assets in non-combat situations by the Japanese SDF personnel under Article 95-2 of the SDF Law. Beyond the US, this is the first time that Article 95-2 of the SDF law is applied to another military. Earlier this year, Japan and Australia have finalised the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA).

- **Prime Minister Suga Delivers Key Policy Speech in the Diet**

On October 26, Prime Minister Suga delivered a key policy speech at the beginning of the extraordinary Diet session which is scheduled to continue till December 5. The focus remained on reinvigorating the economy and the pandemic, firming up national security and advancing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. He stressed on reviving the local economy with agricultural reform and tourism, breaking down bureaucratic red tape and vested interests, advancing digitalization, and also incorporating infertility treatment in national health insurance in order to manage the demographic challenge. He also officially outlined Japan's pledge to go carbon neutral by 2050, and making fundamental transition from Japan's reliance

on coal to a mix of renewable and nuclear power. On the foreign policy front, he reiterated US-Japan alliance as the cornerstone of national security and argued that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision and multilateral free trade frameworks will continue as mainstay of his administration.

- **US-Japan biennial Keen Sword 21 Exercise**

US Indo-Pacific Command forces along with Japan Self-Defense Force units are undertaking the biennial Keen Sword 21 exercise from October 26-November 5 on military installations throughout Japan, Okinawa and surrounding territorial waters. The objective is to bolster US-Japan combat readiness and interoperability and stressing American resolve to support regional allies. Reports suggests that around 9,000 personnel from American Navy, Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps are participating, along with ships from the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group and around 100 aircraft from Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 5, USS Ashland (LSD 48), HMCS Winnipeg (FFH 338), Commander Task Force 72 and 5th Air Force.

- **Australia will join the Malabar Exercise**

The Malabar naval exercise 2020 is scheduled to be held in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea later this year. To advance greater interoperability with like-minded navies, Australian Navy will join Malabar 2020. Malabar Exercise which started as a bilateral Indian Navy-US Navy exercise, was joined by Japan in 2015. This annual exercise has been conducted off the coast of Guam in the Philippine Sea in 2018 and off the coast the Japan in 2019.

- **Tokyo hosted Quad Ministerial Meeting**

On October 6, Tokyo hosted the second Australia-India-Japan-United States Ministerial Meeting. External Affairs Ministers, Jaishankar held consultation on the post Covid-19 international order with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne. As India assumes membership of the UN Security Council in 2021, it seeks collective solutions to global challenges, including global recovery from the pandemic and reform of multilateral institutions. The leaders reiterated the collective vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, anchored on a rules-based international order, underpinned by the rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes. Post-pandemic, it is imperative for likeminded countries to coordinate response on a wide range of issues including increasing the resilience of supply chains; and enhancing access to affordable vaccines, medicines and medical equipment, connectivity; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; maritime safety and security; health security, and counter terrorism.

- **India-Japan Strategic Dialogue and Cybersecurity Agreement**

Tokyo hosted the 13th India-Japan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue on October 7. Indo-Pacific has attained larger salience in recent times and given the mutuality of strategic interests and commonality of values, Japan is considered as a lead partner in the connectivity pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI). During the discussion, External Affairs Ministers, Jaishankar and his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi stressed the significance of digital technologies and the need for resilient digital and cyber systems. In this context, text of the cybersecurity agreement has been finalized, aimed at promoting cooperation in capacity building, research and development, security and resilience in the areas of Critical Information Infrastructure, 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), and Artificial Intelligence (AI).